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Closing Thoughts on 2008

December 24, 2008

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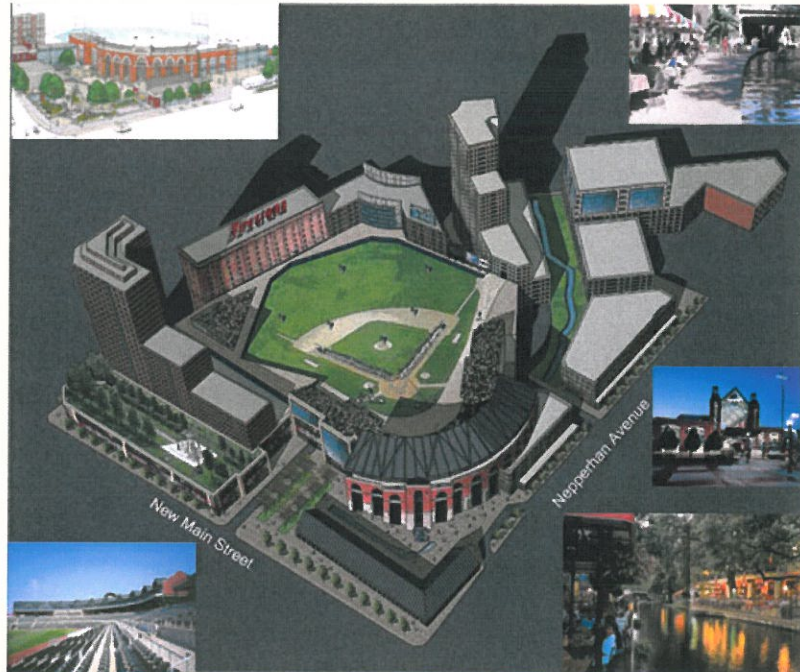
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As the Yonkers City Council wraps up 2008, I want to reflect on my third year in office by saying that it has been an honor and a privilege to serve you. If it weren't for the outstanding members of this Council, Yonkers would not be steps away from a major downtown renaissance which will help create economic independence as Yonkers is poised to become the third largest city in New York State.

As was England in the time of Charles Dickens, Yonkers in 2008 can be described as "The Best of Times and the Worst of Times." Despite the economic crisis and the chilling effect it has had on our budget, we are on the cusp of a great Renaissance for the 21st century and I am determined to see it come to fruition. We are the 4th and soon to be the 3rd largest city in New York and there is no reason that we shouldn't *be* the best and *have* the best of everything.

We have many accomplishments to be proud of. I call everyone together to celebrate a great year as we look forward to 2009.

[On the Development Front](#)



The City Council completed the environmental review and approved the SEQRA Findings for the \$1.6 billion redevelopment proposal by [Struever Fidelco Cappelli](#). This was done through an open process with significant community input --some might argue too much--but we met our goals and deadlines when we needed to under intense pressure from all sides.

This is not to say the process is over. We still have a tremendous amount of work to do on the Land Disposition Agreement (LDA) with the administration in order to formally transfer the property to the developers. Also, we need to work with the county on other issues such as Tax Increment Financing (TIF), but I am confident that we will work through all of the details with the same resolve and determination that brought us to where we are today.

Part of the SFC project includes daylighting the Saw Mill River at River Park Center (Chicken Island). We moved one step closer to this after receiving a \$889,183 check from the EPA Targeted Watershed Grant. The check was presented to [Groundwork Hudson Valley's](#) Saw Mill River Coalition this month to assist with pollution cleanup, restoration and other measures to improve the river.

The second phase of our two [Hudson Park](#) luxury waterfront apartment buildings opened this summer on the Hudson River with the Council's assistance in helping to shape and approve the project. The buildings are filling up as word spreads about the incredible Hudson River views and rents, especially in comparison to Manhattan's.

The [Alexander Street Master Plan](#), a mixed- use neighborhood with 12 residential towers covering 112 acres on a 1.3-mile

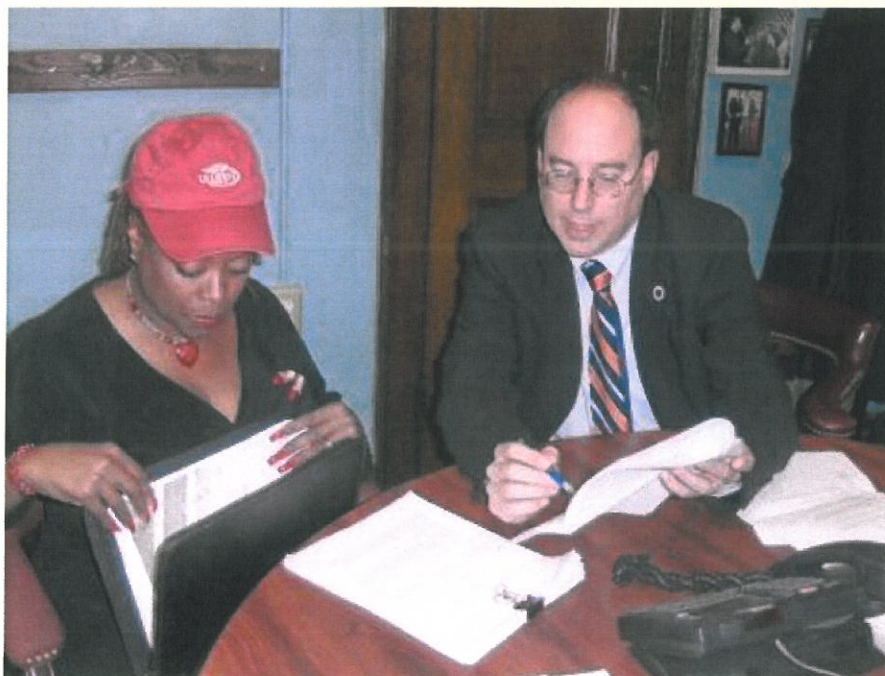
stretch along the Hudson River, just north of Hudson Park, is also in the works. The site has just been approved by the Community Development Agency (CDA) this month and we look forward to getting the Council briefed on the project in early January.

America Holdings Inc. recently presented their \$900 million [Point Street Landing](#) waterfront project located on Alexander Street to the CDA. The development calls for 1,124 housing units in four high-rise buildings and a number of townhouse units. The four towers would stand 33, 26, 39 and 26 stories tall. Included will be 54,000 sf of office space, 40,000 sf of retail space, 142 marina wet slips, 230 marina dry slips, parking for 1,830 vehicles, and four acres of accessible public space.

We also celebrate the opening of [66 Main Street](#), our first downtown geothermal building, which is in full swing as young professionals and others discover downtown loft living. Thanks to the state's 80-20 tax credit program, 20 percent of the units are affordable.

There is a new feeling of urban energy surrounding the waterfront as these newcomers (and some old comers) bring even more vitality to our burgeoning downtown which already boasts [X2O](#), a five-star waterfront restaurant on the historic pier, as well as other fine dining restaurants such as [Zuppa](#) (Progressive Italian) and [Belle Havana](#) (French/Cuban). In addition to convenient shopping, the downtown boasts a 5,200 sf. eclectic art inspired dance and fitness studio, [The Loft Dance and Fitness](#), and the upcoming [Blue Door Art Gallery](#) on Hudson Street. There are also duplex lofts for rent in the downtown at the old Trolley Barn Building now called [Metro 92](#).

On the Affordable Housing Front



A year after Councilwoman Pat McDow and I, who are the Real Estate Committee co-chairs, proposed extending the [Affordable Housing Ordinance](#), especially in light of the SFC Findings, the Administration sent their revised version in late November. Now that we have the proposal, we look forward to negotiating a

comprehensive ordinance early next year that adequately addresses the needs of Yonkers and our residents.

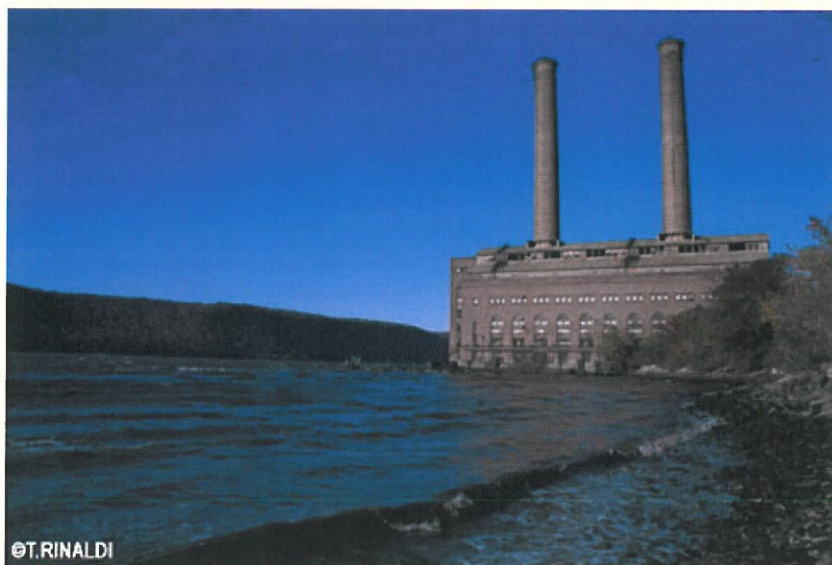
We celebrated the opening of two affordable housing developments in the past month. The first was at the Highland Avenue Senior Apartments, a new building with 88 units of senior rental housing and the other was at the Croton Heights Apartments, a brand-new, \$23 million, 60-unit affordable rental community on Ashburton Avenue.

The Croton Heights Apartments are the first of several developments to replace Mulford Gardens, an aged public housing structure, under HUD's [Hope VI program](#)

Just across the street from the Croton Heights apartments, construction is almost complete on the [Fr. Pat Carroll Homes](#) which is comprised of 62 townhouses. The Council also just approved a new grocery store just across its street in the the Whitney Young Apartments, a Mitchell-Lama Affordable Development recently renovated by [Mo Vaughn](#) and [Omni New York LLC](#).

On the Historic Preservation and Sustainable Development Front

After months of calling for a demolition review ordinance by which the public and the [Landmarks Preservation Review Board](#) must be notified of potential demolitions of truly historic buildings, the Council finally convinced the Mayor to issue an Executive Order to make certain that we protect our historic homes- not allow developers to tear them down.



Through the Council's actions, we were able to save 575 N. Broadway, a gorgeous Hudson River view estate designed in 1910 by renowned architect [Wilson Eyre Jr.](#) from demolition. The home is now under renovation by a private owner who cherished its charm. It is unfortunate that the same could not be said for 87 Nepperhan, an ornamental art deco style building that came under review by the Council as part of SFC's development plan on the office building in front of City Hall. The developer has however promised to save as many of the adornments as possible when building a garage to accommodate parking for 1,600 cars. This compromise would not have been possible without the advocacy of the historic preservation community.

In response to building trends, the Council additionally called for the creation of an updated city-wide registry of historic buildings and funded a study for which more than a dozen professionals have submitted proposals in order to further formalize the process.

This Council landmarked its first mixed use historic district across from historic [Philipse Manor Hall](#) and continues to monitor the proposed [Greyston](#) development. While I am a fan of adaptive reuse, I also recognize that the alternatives must be economically viable.

Adaptive reuse also made its way into the [Alexander Street Master Plan](#) for both the [Glenwood Power Station](#) and the Yonkers City Jail.

As for the greening of Yonkers, we are now the new home of the [Science Barge](#), a floating sustainable urban farm on the Yonkers waterfront acquired by [Groundwork Hudson Valley](#) with initial support of a \$75,000 annual three year commitment thanks to Richard Kessel and Sobeida Cruz of the [New York Power Authority](#). It joins the [Beczak Environmental Education Center](#), the [Hudson River Museum](#) and the new [Riverside High School](#) in further establishing Yonkers as a center for environmental learning which will also add economic benefit to the city and the waterfront.

The [Yonkers Green Policy Task Force](#) (GPTF) also won a 2008 Coca Cola/National Recycling Coalition Bin Grant Program, thanks to member **Molly Roffman** who applied for the grant. The award is providing 75 beverage recycling bins for an 11,000 student population in the Yonkers junior and senior high schools.

Additionally, the GPTF won a \$300,000 [Clean School Bus](#) grant from the EPA in April to retrofit school busses in order to reduce harmful emissions caused by diesel school buses. Much thanks to everyone on the GPTF for their dedication to making Yonkers cleaner and greener.

Thanks to my former Legislative Assistant **Samantha Wapnick**, we also held Yonkers first Green Week in April, hosting sustainable events such as films, lectures and hands-on projects as well as green trade conferences. The GPTF also supported the permanent ban on leaf blowers from June 1 to September 30 which was unanimously approved by the City Council.

Sustainable Development took a major step forward with the development of green building legislation based on bills introduced separately by Minority Leader Liam McLaughlin, Councilman John Murtagh, and me and vetted by the Council's Green Policy Task Force, which is lead by Chairman Bob Walters.

Sustainable Development was also a driving force behind the formation of a McMansion Task Force for which Councilwoman Dee Barbato took the lead. The Task Force's next step is getting recommendations back from the Planning Board so we can move forward with new residential design and compatibility standards.

Councilwoman Barbato and I have also been working on the Ridge Hill Task Force which has focused on seeking funding and approvals for constructing a ramp from the Sprain Brook Parkway to [Ridge Hill Village](#). While the ramp's prospects looked bleak a few months ago, it has new life due to the anticipated \$10 billion in federal highway funding that will be part of the Economic Stimulus Package. Task Force Manager Mary Ann Crotty has been diligent in working to line up support from the state and the county on this and will be briefing the community in the months to come. Construction continues on Ridge Hill Village with an anticipated opening in the next year or so.

On the Schools Front



The good news is Yonkers schools are outperforming even the top-ranked schools in the country, as well as leading Westchester, as evidenced by [US News and World Report](#) in awarding [Yonkers High School](#) with their coveted Gold Medal Award which ranks them #37 among the best high schools in the nation!

We welcome [Yonkers Palisade Preparatory School](#), a new middle and high school where 160 kids receive a private school education in a public school setting thanks to the [College Board](#) for providing financing from the [Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation](#) and the [Michael and Susan Dell Foundation](#). Yonkers now has 40 schools serving grades kindergarten through 12.

The Council with its dedication to our schools was happy to provide \$28 million from the 2007-08 Capital Improvement Budget to improve Yonkers for general rehab of school buildings and for equipment and technical improvements. For example, \$10.2 million will be spent on such much-needed improvements as roof repair, exterior masonry repairs and a new fire alarm system at PEARLS. Saunders and Yonkers Middle High will receive more than \$1 million each in HVAC repairs. For a complete list, contact the [Yonkers Board of Education](#).

Photo credit: Ruby Washington/The New York Times

A Note of Thanks



It would be impossible to thank everyone for their contributions over the past year so I will call out just a few.

First, I would like to thank **Paul Thomas** of [Attorney General Andrew Cuomo's](#) office for helping us reach out to senior citizen groups by

organizing several
consumer protection forums throughout the year.

I also want to thank **Fr. John** of [St. John's Episcopal Church](#) for running the Yonkers Farmer's Market on Thursdays where I have kept a constituent services booth to help people solve problems such as landlord/tenant situations, disability issues and more.

Recognition also goes to **Hudson Valley Parents' Day** and to the organizers of **Annual Parents' Day**

Thanks to the [Yonkers YWCA](#) for working with us on the annual "Week Without Violence" event and to former Councilmember **Bob Stauf** for his participation in bringing the Brahma Kumaris to City Hall to honor the United Nations' International Day of Peace.

Also to the [Guardian Angels](#) and those who are starting neighborhood watch programs to help curb crime. I recently appeared with them and Carol Bengis from my office during school assemblies at St. Anthony's, Sacred Heart and Christ the King.

The Council congratulates **Joan Gronowski** for completing her first year on the Council, as she continues to raise important issues such as campaign finance reform. I am pleased to work with her on achieving tax fairness through the revaluation of properties in Yonkers as well, something our city desperately needs to level the playing field. In May, the Council voted unanimously to support a county-wide reassessment of all property. Subsequently Councilwoman Gronowski reintroduced her resolution that the City of Yonkers undertake reassessment independent of the county's action.

While the county is currently engaged in a study of various aspects of reassessment, many Westchester municipalities are choosing to do it on their own or with other willing participants. I am hopeful that Yonkers will take the lead in this endeavor.

I also congratulate **Councilmember Sandy Annabi** on completing her first year as Majority Leader. Sandy continues to be vigilant on fighting for school funding and public safety issues while joining Joan and others to call into question abuses in the budget and measures to properly manage the City.

We have welcomed two new employees to our team at City Hall. **Gina Saglimbeni** works with the staff of the Council Majority and **Jason Rosso** assists with the Environment Policy and Protection and Inter-governmental Committees in addition to the Green Policy Task Force. We said farewell to **Samantha Wapnick** who held that job and to 14-year veteran **Tracy Fields**. We congratulate **Don Weigand** on his marriage, and **Frank Hudack** from the TV studio and **Dominick Savarese** from SEIU 704 on the births of their babies. We are glad to have **Joan Deierlein** back and thank **Vinny Spano** for taking the lead in her absence. We were very sorry to see **Barbara Flatley** retire but we wish her the very best.

We wish to thank our teachers, fire, police and DPW workers for their service to our city. I thank **Hugh Fox** for his tenure as President of Local 628 and welcome incoming President **Pat Brady**. We thank all of the unions for raising the standard of living for their membership and improving the quality of services to the residents. We thank **Mayor Philip Amicone** and the administration, along with Schools Superintendent **Bernard Pierorazio** and his staff for running the city and its schools to standards that improve every day.

I would like to thank our colleagues in government who help Yonkers whenever they can: County Legislators **Ken Jenkins**, **Jose Alvarado**, **Bernice Spreckman** and **Gordon Burrows**; County Clerk **Tim Idoni**, District Attorney **Janet DiFiore**, County Executive **Andy Spano**; Assemblymen **Mike Spano**, **Gary Pretlow** and **Richard Brodsky**; State Senators **Andrea Stewart-Cousins** and **Jeff Klein**; Attorney General **Andrew Cuomo**; Comptroller **Tom DiNapoli**; Governor **David Paterson**; Congressmembers **Nita Lowey** and **Eliot Engel**; Senators **Chuck Schumer** and

Hillary Clinton.

I would be remiss if we did not say a special thank you to our consultants who worked tirelessly on the SFC project - **Kevin Ryan**, our SEQRA attorney; AKRF - **John Feingold**, **Nanette Bourne**, **Richard Klusek**; and our TIF Consultant, **Lamont Blackstone**. Thank you to **Christian DiPalermo** who had very big shoes to fill as he stepped into the position as Counsel to the Majority as well as **Mark Constantine**, counsel to the majority, who has been a pleasure to work with.

I also want to thank accountants **Nick DeSantis** and **Scott Oling** who work to help the Council to formulate the budget. This was not an easy task last year and will prove much more difficult as we go forward.

I also want to mention and thank those Yonkers residents who attend Council meetings during the course of the year. These citizens watchdog the government process, issuing their own sets of checks and balances through their independent appraisals of our due diligence.

I want to recognize my colleagues on the Council who have worked so hard for Yonkers this and every year: **Pat McDow**, district 1; Majority Leader **Sandy Annabi**, district 2; **Joan Gronowski**, district 3; Minority Leader **Liam McLaughlin**, district 4; **John Murtagh**, district 5; and **Dee Barbato**, district 6.

I would also like to recognize my staff for all of their hard work throughout the year, specifically for the long hours they endure. My Chief of Staff, **Rocky Richard**, keeps a watchful eye on all the operations and juggles a multitude of projects on a daily basis with ease. The work that she and **Richard Marmolejos** do on the Real Estate Committee is exemplary, especially regarding the SFC project.

I would also like to thank **Richard** for shepherding hundreds of documents through the system and for posting them on my City of Yonkers webpage in an effort to maintain transparency in government. Also for the long hours he keeps at committee meetings.

I thank **Carol Bengis** for her vision and dedication to the residents of Yonkers as my constituent/community affairs liaison and for her specific work in organizing programs to help stop domestic violence, child abuse and gang violence. She is working with community members to help establish neighborhood watch programs and helps hundreds of Yonkers residents through our semi-annual Quality of Life events.

To **Laura Fahrenthold**, who has taken my communications to a new level. Her ebasts have enjoyed an ever-growing audience as people come to depend on our office as a "go to" for all things Council- related and Yonkers-centric. Also for her expert handling of my external communications and her work on my webpage. You may have missed receiving a printed copy of my fall newsletter as my office works to further cut expenses, but you can look forward to receiving it online.

Finally, I would like to thank my Executive Assistant **Dwanita Crosby** for keeping me organized and on-the-go by sending me to several hundred events this past year often armed with proclamations that she has drafted. Also for handling the City Council's events for the Columbus, Polish, Arab-American, and Irish Committees, among others.

As we say goodbye to 2008, we remember our losses here at home - our beloved Counsel **Harvey Kaminsky**, **Clarence Bolen** from Office Services and **Greg Thomey** from the Buildings Department.

We pay tribute to our soldiers who are fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan and pray for their safe and speedy return. Here at home, we give many thanks to our brave first responders, as well as to our

emergency workers.

For our country, I hope for a future filled with much peace and prosperity. And for all of us here, I wish everyone a safe, healthy and happy holiday season amidst our economic crisis.

While I remain realistic about the days ahead, I am optimistic about our futures. As former **President Clinton** said during his 1992 inauguration, "There is nothing that is wrong with this country that can not be fixed by what is right with this country."

We are all in this together and we must all share the sacrifice as we grow Yonkers to becoming an even greater city.

Thank you.



Edited by Laura Fahrenthold

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